

Prayer in Faith

Letter of James 5:13-20

Introduction

We will be celebrating Christmas next week. What are you praying to God for this Christmas? Some of you may be praying, "May this corona situation be over soon." If you are a child, you may be praying, "Let me have that present." Prayer, I think, is the act of hoping and praying for something to God. Today, we will read the last part of chapter 5 of the book of James. At the end of the letter, James encourages the people to pray in a certain way. Before we celebrate Christmas, we should also take time to think about prayer.

The Scripture we are going to read is James 5:13-20 in the New Testament.

Bible Reading

James 5:13-20

^{5:13} Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

¹⁷ Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

This is the Word of the Lord. Amen

Today, we are going to look at three aspects of prayer in faith from the letter of James: first, through prayer in faith, God saves those who are ailing; second, through prayer in faith, God reveals sin to people and leads them to repentance; and third, prayer in faith reminds people of the Savior Jesus, and leads them back to Him. To summarize today's sermon, prayer in faith saves the ailing, brings them to repentance, and leads them to Jesus.

The letter of James is said to have been written by James, the brother of Jesus and son of their mother, Mary. James was the leader of the church that was established in Jerusalem. James wrote in chapter 1 verse 1 of this letter addressing, "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" James is writing this letter to those who had become Christians from the Jews, but had been persecuted and scattered to different places, informing them of how they should live.

First, through prayer in faith, God saves those who are ailing. Take a look at verse 13: "Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise." At the end of this letter, James tells the persecuted and scattered Christians that if anyone is suffering, he should pray. The word "suffering" in this passage does not refer only to physical pain caused by illness. It includes various kinds of suffering, such as

suffering from evil, persecution, and mental anguish. James tells us that those who are in such a situation to foremost pray, that they ought to pray.

The word "pray" in the original language means "to inquire of God" or "to ask of God". He goes on to tell us that if someone is joyful, he should praise God. Joy is a feeling of encouragement, good, benefit, or blessing. James says if you feel that way, you should praise God. The word "praise" has the meaning of "to sing poetry or songs." Let's take a look at verse 14

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.

Sick people refer to those who are in a state of physical and spiritual weakness. If someone is sick, James says to invite the elders and the leaders of the church to come to the house and anoint them with olive oil and pray for them. The word "olive oil" is found in the Japanese Bible, but in the original language, it only says "oil". In ancient Rome and the Mediterranean world, where the Bible was written, the word "oil" was used to refer to olive oil. For the Jews, anointing or pouring oil was a sign of sanctification for the king, high priest and their children. Jesus' disciples were also given the authority to heal the sick by anointing them with oil when they were sent to preach in the cities.

The pouring and applying of olive oil is symbolic of the pouring of the Holy Spirit. Even in modern times, olive oil has been found to be effective in protecting the skin and treating rashes, so that pharmacies sometimes prescribe olive oil for medicinal purposes as opposed to for consumption. However, James is not saying that olive oil or the elders invited to the house will heal a person's illness. James is telling us to pray to the Lord God, who is the ruler and healer of all things, who will work boldly to heal the sick person in the name of the Lord. Let's take a look at verse 15. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

The word "prayer" in verse 15 is a different word from the word "prayer" in verse 14, which means "bowing down" or "earnestly. And that prayer is a prayer of faith in God, confidence in God, earnestness in God, and a prayer for God to work in our lives. James assures us that God is able to save, raise up, or in other words, heal those who are sick, and if the sick person has sinned, God will grant forgiveness for that sin.

The act of our prayer itself has no power and therefore cannot heal the sick. But through our prayers, we can ask God, the Creator, to work and intervene.

When I first became a Christian, there was a time when I felt I had experienced the power of prayer. At the church I used to attend in New York City, a family of immigrants from Ecuador, South America, visited the church. The father of the family was listening intently to the message that was being translated from English to Spanish. His wife, daughter, and son came with him, but they did not believe in Jesus yet and were just brought here by their father. One day after the service, we received a call that the father was in a coma. He had a large tumor in his brain. An operation was immediately performed to remove the tumor. However, he never recovered and passed away a few days later. When the church heard the news of his hospitalization, all the church members prayed together. I had just become a Christian myself, but I remember praying earnestly with the church members that he would be healed. Yet God called the man to heaven.

However, after the funeral, the remaining family members confessed to the pastor of the church that they wanted to believe in God. The mother, daughter, and son continued to attend the church services and actively participated in our fellowship. After a few months, all three confessed that they believed and were baptized. God called the father of the

family to heaven, but the rest of the family all came to believe in God and were saved. God boldly worked in this family through the prayers of each member of the church.

Brothers and sisters, during this time of Christmas, let us once again be confident that God is always working boldly in us, through our prayers. Our prayers themselves have no power. But through our prayers, God works boldly, healing people and transforming their hearts. Do you want to be changed too? Do you have someone in your heart that you want to be healed, or do you want God to work boldly in your own heart? Let's pray in faith. God will work boldly.

Prayer in faith saves those who are suffering. Prayer in faith saves the afflicted, and prayer in faith reveals sin and leads one to repentance. Let's take a look at verse 16.

¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Verse 16 is connected to verse 15, where it says, "If they have sinned, they will be forgiven." This is in order to be "made well," but what are they being made well from? It represents healing from physical suffering, illness, and spiritual and mental suffering. For that healing, James tells us to pray for each other, not just one person, but in a community of two or more people. Why is it that expressing our sins to each other and praying for each other leads to healing? It has a lot to do with the existence of our sins.

In the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent, and they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had forbidden them from doing. By doing so, they allowed sin to enter the world. And as the Apostle Paul said, "The wages of sin is death," so sin is what makes us mortal. Sin has made us subject to all kinds of sickness, suffering, and mental illness, which lead to death. However, when we confess our sins to the Lord and repent of our sins, we receive forgiveness of sins from God. So James is saying that we should receive healing by confessing our sins to God in the community. And when people who are justified by God and have their sins forgiven pray together, God will work greatly through their prayers.

Let's take a look at verses 17 and 18 next.

¹⁷ Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Here, James tells us that an example of prayer is what happened to the prophet Elijah. As for Elijah's prayer, it is recorded in 1 Kings chapters 17 and 18. When Elijah was called by God to be a prophet, Ahab, the king, was actively engaged in pagan idolatry, namely, Baal worship, and the king's people were turning their backs on the true God. King Ahab also hated Elijah for not prophesying what he wanted. Elijah said to King Ahab in 1 Kings 17:1, Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe[a] in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

Elijah prayed to the Lord God. The people were worshipping Baal for a good harvest and good crops. In order for the people to turn back to the true God, Elijah prayed for no rain, and God heard Elijah's prayer. During the three years and six months that the Lord did not send rain, the Lord provided Elijah with water, food, and other necessities. Elijah was then confronted by 400 prophets of Baal, whom King Ahab worshipped. Elijah prayed to the Lord there, and the Lord worked for him. After that, heavy rains were brought to the land of Israel. This is a famous episode for the Israelites. Elijah was just another prophet, just

another man. However, James saw from Elijah's prayer that God was working boldly through prayer, showing the magnificence of God and the power of people repenting their sins and turning to the Lord. Prayer in faith reveals sin to people and leads them to repentance.

I have to confess something to you all. My prayers have shown me that there are many things that I am not praying in faith. For the past two months, there have been a lot of changes in the ministry of Grace City, and I have been given the task of making decisions with no idea what the next month will look like. But I felt like I wasn't getting anywhere, and my heart was getting anxious. I had also been in a situation where I had no peace before God, even though I had shared with you in my previous sermon how important it was to rest in the Lord.

When I was in the throes of anxiety, I managed to put my anxiety aside and pray to God. Through prayer, God pointed out to me the sin of unbelief. The Bible confesses that God is able to work all things together for good, but in prayer I was shown my lack of faith in this truth, which led me to repent of my unbelief in God and face Him again.

Prayer in faith, brothers and sisters, will show us that we are sinners before God. It may be something we do not want to face and it may be painful for us. But this is the Christmas gift of healing that God has offered to us. When we are shown of our sins, let us repent, receive forgiveness, and be at peace with God again. The prayers of those whom God has found to be righteous will be greatly used and God will work through those very prayers.

Prayer by faith can save a person who is suffering. It shows people their sins and leads them to repentance. Prayer by faith reminds us of our Savior Jesus and leads us to Him.

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Finally, James tells the community of Christians, who are scattered in different regions, that if some people have strayed from the truth, he wants them to be brought back. They should also know that the one who brings them back will save the sinner's soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. He concludes his letter by saying, "someone should bring that person back". Why does he conclude his letter in this way? At the time James' letter was written, the Christian community was persecuted and scattered in many places. In the midst of such a long persecution, there were times when they fell into the temptation of sin. So James encouraged the community to bring back those who had wandered away.

And when we read this passage, we see there the prayerful presence of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus and his disciples were eating the Passover supper, Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, with you I am ready to die, whether in prison or in death." However, Peter later betrayed Jesus by saying that he did not know Jesus three times before the chicken crowed three times. Before that, Jesus said to Peter: "I am the Son of God. Luke 22:32. but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers."

Jesus knew that Peter would commit the sin of betrayal. But Jesus prayed that God would work in Peter so that he would not lose his faith, and in fact, Peter's sins were forgiven, he turned around, and even after Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven, he fulfilled his ministry as an apostle. When we read the end of James' letter, we see the prayer of Jesus Christ in it. Prayer in faith reminds us of our Savior Jesus and leads us to Him.

When I was attending a church in New York, I realized that prayer in faith leads to Jesus through a man who had just become a Christian. The man had a childhood friend. They went to elementary, junior high, and high school together. However, the childhood friend started to hang out with bad friends and got involved in drugs. They lost touch with each other after that. One day, they bumped into each other on the street, and after seeing each other again, the man began to have a strong desire for his childhood friend to come to church and become a Christian. After that, his childhood friend started going to church. The man's prayer was heard, and his childhood friend was baptized and became a Christian. There was great joy in that. Seeing the newly Christian man praying reminded me of how Jesus prayed for His disciples and for people, and it led me to know Him more deeply.

Prayer in faith, brothers and sisters, reminds us of our Savior Jesus and leads us to Him. When we pray, our prayers grow in maturity and we remember how Jesus prayed for His disciples, and for His people. Before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." God accomplished what we truly want, which is to be saved from death due to sin, by crucifying Jesus Christ.

Jesus was then resurrected on the third day and claimed complete victory over death by sin. Praise be to God who has truly heard and fulfilled our prayers and desires. Through prayer in faith, we know God is alive and boldly at work among us.

Let us Pray

Gracious Father in heaven, Lord, we thank You for the grace of being reminded deeply of Your Grace through Your Word on prayer during this Advent season in which we await the birthdate of Jesus. Lord, there is no power in our prayers per se, but we thank You that You work boldly through our prayers in faith to heal our suffering and that of others. We thank You that You are always at work. We also thank you that through prayer, you point out our sins and invite us to repent. Please heal us through the repentance of our sins, so that we can receive full peace of mind with you. Finally, we thank you, Jesus, for the blessing of being led by you through the prayer in faith, seeing Your graciousness and Your character. We ask You to make Christmas a time of deep knowledge of You, our Savior and the Savior of this world. We thank You, Lord, for Your Word. We offer this prayer before you in the name of our beloved Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.